

An Innovator and Lifelong Friend

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While there is joy in reaching destinations and achieving goals, greater pleasure lies in the journey itself. This is an axiom that has been passed down through generations, and it must be internalized before a life can truly be well lived. I heard this adage many times during my teenage years. In the true spirit of adolescence, I do not think that I truly understood or appreciated it at that time. My eyes were firmly trained on a career in my field of choice – the field of medicine.

I am now just over ten years removed from my medical school graduation day. As a busy physician with the formal classroom seemingly miles away in my rear-view mirror, I can reflect upon my formal education and realize that I have been blessed beyond my wildest dreams. My good fortune began early, as I was admitted to some of the nation's finest undergraduate degree programs in both the Ivy League and on the West Coast. I ultimately accepted admission into one of the nation's top ten medical schools directly from high school via a rigorous program known as Inteflex, a 7-year combined undergraduate/medical school program at the University of Michigan which accepted approximately 7percent of its applicant pool during my year of admission.

Graduation from medical school was followed by residency training in pediatrics at the Children's Hospital of Michigan, the third oldest children's hospital in the United States and a storied institution in its own right. Despite these heady accomplishments, the most valuable time period during my years of schooling did not occur on a university campus, nor did it occur in the hallways of a major hospital.

To the surprise of many, I tell anyone who asks which institution provided me with the best educational experience that my high school years were the most important and rewarding time period

during my academic career. This is true because I had the privilege of being educated at the Kalamazoo Area Mathematics and Science Center (KAMSC) during those formative years. Both my interest and aptitude in the disciplines of mathematics and science were exceptionally high during middle school, but with that interest came an awkward feeling that it may somehow be "uncool" to have a special interest in these subjects. It became obvious during those early teen years that asking extra questions in science class was not welcomed by classmates and would not be a ticket to the upper echelon of the teenage social hierarchy. Unlike the typical high school, KAMSC provided an environment that was the perfect fit for me as an inquisitive yet insecure teen. Our teachers were always full of enthusiasm and willing to answer the extra question during class. Any question that had not been answered fully in class typically spawned a mini after-class seminar, with several students surrounding a teacher for an invaluable exchange of ideas. That was the norm at KAMSC.

KAMSC also taught me how to use the latest technology to help solve problems. Throughout my high school years, the latest technological advances available were always at my fingertips. Every KAMSC student was required to purchase a scientific calculator with the ability to graph algebraic expressions (financial assistance was offered to help those who could not afford one of these units to obtain one). Computers on every desktop were the rule, not the exception. The latest version of the Apple Macintosh computer was available on every desk in the building, with a phenomenal student-to-computer ratio of 2-to-1. An electron microscope was donated by the Upjohn Company, making KAMSC one of two high schools in the country with this type of microscope on-site. The numerous high-powered microscopes available in the biology lab made it

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possible for my biology teacher to give lab-based microscope slide testing that is nearly unheard of at the high school level. These tests involved students being tested on identifying different types of tissues and cells under a microscope, then answering a few questions about that tissue or cell before moving on to the next microscope station at 90-second intervals. Learning how to study for this challenging type of examination prepared me for rigorous premedical and medical school curricula, which also utilized this examination method, years earlier than my counterparts hailing from exclusive suburban school districts and East Coast preparatory schools. There is no doubt that much of the technology that I used while at KAMSC is now considered obsolete, but it helped me realize that technology is a powerful force that is always moving forward at a rapid pace. Those who fail to adapt to modern technology quickly become irrelevant. Learning to adapt to technology so that I can use it to my benefit is a life skill that I first honed at KAMSC.

Another valuable component of the KAMSC experience was the daily interaction with my talented classmates. It has almost become cliché for elite universities to say that the best part of being at their institution is interacting with the student body, but at KAMSC it is true. I have been surrounded by some of the most brilliant minds on the planet throughout my training, but I can say without hesitation that my KAMSC classmates were the brightest group of people with which I have had the privilege to study. We all had our own unique talents, but first and foremost, we all loved to learn. A love of knowledge that is more potent and contagious than the learning is “uncool” attitude that still has a stranglehold on far too many classrooms today. One look at the list of alumni and their accomplishments will show this to be true. My classmates have moved forward and attended some of the finest institutions in the country. All are quite successful, with a broad spectrum of chosen career paths that include internet entrepreneurs, leaders in nanotechnology research, college professors, Space Shuttle astronauts, software developers, and . . . yes . . . a general pediatrician in South Bend who fondly looks back upon his years at KAMSC as being a special time in his life.

Despite her academic prowess, the heart and soul of KAMSC lies with her people. The teachers, students, and alumni remain united and committed to maintaining KAMSC’s excellence. It remains a place that I can return to and know that I will be welcomed with open arms. I have called upon former teachers quite often to ask for career advice, and they continue to serve as mentors when called upon. On a more personal level, my former KAMSC instructors have been present in my life during both good times and bad. I remember celebrating with my former KAMSC teachers at my wedding, and finding comfort in their presence and words at the funerals of both of my parents. Many organizations boast of being a family, but when you look behind the façade you see gross dysfunction gnawing at the foundation. I can honestly tell you that my KAMSC family is strong and continues to be a resource for me to this day.

I salute KAMSC and thank her. She has nurtured me and watched me grow, as my experiences have taught me to respect and honor the quest for knowledge. At a time when our country’s ability to effectively provide math and science education has been questioned, KAMSC has served as a veritable beacon of hope where many bright and dedicated students continue to explore, learn, and share ideas. The KAMSC alumni roster has grown to reach a critical mass that will allow us to become a tangible force in improving our society. I fully expect for someone from KAMSC to win a Nobel Prize during my lifetime. The thought of a KAMSC graduate starting a corporation that bolts into the Fortune 500 will also likely become a reality. Most importantly, I hope that KAMSC graduates and all educated people with a zest for learning can use their knowledge to help solve the problems of this new millennium.

With knowledge comes power, and that power cannot be abused. As my KAMSC calculus instructor correctly stated, “It’s nice to be important, but it is also important to be nice.” The problems that face our society seem daunting, but we have creative minds that can leverage our ever-expanding knowledge base to solve those problems. I trust that we can look back towards KAMSC, an innovator in the education of gifted high school students, as a source of inspiration as we forge ahead.